

*Charles*  
Members of the Committee, my name is Mark Good, I live in Great Falls and work for the Montana Wilderness Association

EXHIBIT 12

DATE 3/12/09

SB 5519

The purpose of this resolution, as I understand it, appears to be to advocate for the preferential treatment of Conservation Districts over other users in the refuge planning process. It seems to me that they already have it. The conservation district is a cooperating agency, and as such is allowed to have a representative participate in the in-house interdisciplinary team meetings. By contrast, Conservation groups representing hunters and other uses aren't even allowed to attend the meetings. Conservation Districts can also participate in the many public meetings held locally and submit written comments – like the rest of the public, I believe it is fair to say that CMR staff communication with Conservation Districts is at least as "open and timely" as with all other user groups.

I think the real objection by the conservation district is that the CMR is a national wildlife refuge.

For members of the committee not familiar with the CM Russell National Wildlife Refuge, it has been described as one of the crown jewels in the national wildlife Refuge system. Part of the attraction is its scenic beauty - forested coulees, river canyons, badlands, grasslands and buttes. But more important, is the wildlife populations and the efforts which have been made over the years to protect and restore wildlife and wildlife habitat. It is now home to 45 types of mammals, including bighorn sheep and elk. There are also 236 species of birds and they are trying to prevent the extinction of the most endangered species in North America - the black-footed ferret. Most know the CMR as one the best, if not the best, hunting and bird watching areas in Montana. It attracts hunters from all around the state and the nation looking for a quality hunt.

As a National Wildlife Refuge, the primary mission of the CMR is the preservation, enhancement, and restoration of wildlife and plant resources and their habitat. Some commercial and recreational use is allowed on the Refuge. Priority recreational uses include hunting, fishing, wildlife observation, photography, environmental education and interpretation. But uses such as camping, outfitting, livestock grazing, bicycling, horseback riding, motorized vehicle use are secondary and all of these uses are only allowed where they are compatible with the primary mission of the refuge.

Now I know that there are some who wish the Refuge were something different or don't agree with the direction of the Refuge – but the bottom line is that wildlife is a priority use. I think most Montanans and most Americans support this mission. Rather than bashing the CMR staff for doing what they are supposed to do, the state of Montana should support and honor the mission of the Refuge. This resolution serves no purpose other than to politicize the public planning process, and make it more contentious.

I urge members of the committee to vote against Senate Joint Resolution 19.

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